

Washington, DC – U.S. Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) hailed the official signing into law of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, which allocates funding for veterans' health programs and facilities on a two-year cycle, rather than year-by-year.

President Obama signed the bill into law Thursday afternoon at a signing ceremony at the White House attended by Congressman Rodriguez, a co-sponsor of the bill and a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

"The passage and implementation of this law marks a historic change in the way we provide services and support to our nation's veterans," Congressman Rodriguez said. "Dollars for essential programs and critical medical treatment will now be allocated on a two-year cycle, which means better delivery, less waiting and an improved quality of life for our vets."

"It's been more than 20 years that we've been fighting for this and today is a very historic day for vets," said Bobby Barrera, the National Commander of Disabled American Veterans and a Del Rio resident. "Congressman Rodriguez is a true friend of veterans. When it comes to healthcare and access, those are the kinds of things he will fight for."

Barrera, who was wounded in 1969 during the Vietnam War, said he uses the VA frequently and knows what's involved in getting care.

"With this law, the VA will know exactly what they can do ahead of time, instead of reacting after the fact," he said. "It will improve the timeliness and the quality of services we veterans receive."

Veterans organizations, seeing firsthand how often veterans have to wait for essential services, have been requesting the funding change for years. The new law will transform how veterans receive services by giving the VA a longer-term funding forecast. For example, when the VA considers funding for FY 11, the agency will allocate funds for both FY 11 and FY 12. Because the VA will now know how much money is available in upcoming budgets, the agency can more effectively plan for medical services and reduce delays in delivery of much-needed

programs to veterans.

President Obama called the bill part of the creation of a “21st century VA” that will promote accountability, ensure Congressional oversight, is fiscally responsible and “ensures that veterans’ health care will no longer be held hostage to the annual budget battles in Washington.”

Specifically, it provides advance appropriations authority for five medical care accounts of the Veterans Health Administration for two years, beginning in FY 11, including medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities.

The bill requires the Government Accountability Office to study the adequacy and accuracy of the budget projections for the fiscal year involved and the subsequent four fiscal years and requires an annual report from the VA to Congress by July 31 each year detailing cost estimates.

#